CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for controlling program installation on a computing device, the method comprising:

determining the configuration of an existing program that executes on the computing device;

determining the configuration of a new program that is to be installed on the computing device to replace the existing program;

determining whether installation of the new program is authorized; and

preventing installation of the new program if installation is not authorized.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein determining the configuration of an existing program comprises determining at least one of a program type and version, and determining the configuration of a new program comprises determining at least one of a program type and version.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein determining the configuration of an existing program comprises determining the configuration of a program that is embedded in solid-state memory of the computing device.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein determining the configuration of an existing program comprises determining the configuration of an operating system that is embedded in re-writable, solid-state memory of a terminal computer.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein determining the configuration of an existing program comprises reading configuration information stored in a management interface of the computing device.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein determining the configuration of an existing program comprises reading a program type and version from an original equipment manufacturer (OEM) string of a desktop management interface (DMI) of the computing device.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein determining the configuration of a new program comprises reading configuration information from a header associated with the new program.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein determining whether installation of the new program is authorized comprises comparing the existing program and the new program to determine whether they are of the same type.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein determining whether installation of the new program is authorized further comprises comparing version information for the existing program and the new program.

10. A system for controlling program installation, the system comprising:

means for comparing a configuration of an existing operating system that executes on a computing device with a configuration of a new operating system that a user wishes to install on the computing device;

means for determining whether installation of the new operating system is authorized; and

means for installing the new operating system if installation is authorized.

11. The system of claim 10, wherein the means for comparing comprise means for comparing at least one of a type and version of the operating systems.

12. The system of claim 10, wherein the means for comparing comprise means for reading configuration information stored in a management interface of the computing device that relates to the configuration of the existing operating system.

13. The system of claim 10, wherein the means for comparing comprise means for reading configuration information from a header associated with the new operating system.

14. The system of claim 10, wherein the means for determining comprise means for determining whether the operating systems are of the same type.

15. A system stored on a computer-readable medium, the system comprising:

logic configured to determine the type and version of an existing operating system embedded in memory of a computing device;

logic configured to determine the type and version of a new operating system that has been downloaded to the computing device; and

logic configured to determine whether installation of the new program is authorized.

16. The system of claim 15, wherein the logic configured to determine the type and version of an existing operating system comprises logic configured to read configuration information stored in a management interface of the computing device.

17. The system of claim 15, wherein the logic configured to determine the type and version of a new operating system comprises logic configured to read configuration information from a header associated with the new operating system.

18. The system of claim 15, wherein the logic configured to determine whether installation of the new operating system is authorized comprises logic configured to compare the type of the existing operating system with the type of the new operating system.

19. The system of claim 15, further comprising logic configured to install the new operating system and replace the existing operating system when installation is authorized.

20. A computing device, comprising:

a processor; and

memory comprising an operating system and a management interface that comprises configuration information that describes the type and version of the operating system, the configuration information being accessible to a installer program that is configured to install new versions of the operating system.

21. The device of claim 20, wherein the memory comprises re-writable, solid-state memory and wherein the operating system is embedded within the solid-state memory.

22. The device of claim 20, wherein the management interface comprises a desktop management interface (DMI) and the configuration information is stored in a original equipment manufacturer (OEM) string contained within the DMI.

23. The device of claim 20, further comprising an installer program that is configured to install new versions of the operating system.

24. The device of claim 20, wherein the computing device is a terminal computer that does not comprise a hard drive.